

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGE #0371/01 1141526
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 241526Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3406
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0951
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0287
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0114
RUEHT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2142
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0043
RUMIAAA/HQ USSUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L GEORGETOWN 000371

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

WHA/AR
WHA/OAS
S/CRS
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDM](#) [OAS](#) [GY](#)
SUBJECT: GUYANA ELECTION DELAYED, PROESS IN DISARRAY:
PREVIEW #7

REF: A. GEORGETOW 344
[1](#)B. GEORGETOWN 328
[1](#)C. GEORGETOWN 08
[1](#)D. GEORGETOWN 181

Classified By: Ambassador Roland W. Bullen
For reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. U) SUMMARY. The Guyana Elections Commission (GECO) says it cannot deliver elections by the August 4 constitutional due date and will not be ready before August 30. This raises thorny constitutional questions about Guyana's governance after August 4. GECOM has also failed to set a new election date, which leaves the process in limbo. Making matters worse, the three opposition election commissioners have "withdrawn" from GECOM, further disrupting the process. President Bharrat Jagdeo and opposition leader Robert Corbin met April 19 - an encouraging sign - but did not achieve a breakthrough. As it currently stands, if key compromises are not reached by May 4 when Parliament dissolves, Guyana will be left with neither a legislature nor an election date. END SUMMARY.

It's Official: No Elections by Constitutional Deadline

[1](#)2. (SBU) GECOM decided April 12 that it cannot meet the August 4 constitutional deadline for elections and, furthermore, cannot deliver elections before August 30. However, GECOM stopped short of declaring a new election date, leaving the election timeline in disarray. In the absence of official word, several rumors are circulating Georgetown about when elections might be held. The donor-funded Joint International Technical Assessor (JITA) who monitors GECOM's activities told PolOff that GECOM is capable of delivering elections by August 31 and that any failure to do so will only be the result of "deliberate sabotage" by political forces who do not want elections to take place.

Sulking Opposition Commissioners Withdraw from GECOM

13. (SBU) The three opposition-nominated GECOM commissioners announced April 15 that they had "withdrawn" - but did not resign - from GECOM. (Note: Actually resigning would entail financial hardships such as having to retroactively pay duty on their imported duty-free personal vehicles.) They cited GECOM Chairman Steve Surujbally's misleading and non-transparent management style as the reason why they could no longer work with him. The commissioners have made their point, storming away from the table but preserving the option to return.

14. (SBU) The commissioners and GECOM staff have often expressed their frustration with Surujbally in the past five years. But the real impetus for their action now is that Surujbally voted with the PPP-nominated commissioners to proceed with printing of the Preliminary List of Electors, a step the opposition opposes. Casting the tie-breaking (4 to 3) vote was unprecedented and it paves the way for the Claims and Objections exercise to begin May 2. Proceeding with Claims and Objections now is critical if elections are to be held without additional delay.

15. (SBU) Where does this leave the elections process? The absence of opposition commissioners might make it easier for GECOM to make urgently needed decisions - the constitution allows the remaining three commissioners and the Chairman to form a quorum. But this would give the opposition parties a very convenient excuse for disowning and discrediting the election process at a later date. Corbin made this perfectly clear in declaring that "the elections commission is treading on dangerous ground" if it plans to make decisions about elections without the opposition commissioners.

Jagdeo, Corbin Meet: A First Step Towards Dialogue

16. (SBU) President Jagdeo met with opposition leader Robert Corbin April 19, a step that post and other donors have been urging for months. The upshot was an agreement to establish a four-person team to assess the constitutional implications of the now inevitable delay of elections beyond their August 4 due date. This team will be comprised of two from each side - reported to be Attorney-General Doodnauth Singh and Speaker of Parliament Ralph Ramkarran on one side, with PNC/R Chairman Winston Murray and senior counsel Rex McKay on the other. Ramkarran and Murray command some respect as independent-minded politicians, but it is difficult to foresee how a structure that pits the two parties evenly against each other will bring any resolution to the extremely contentious constitutional questions at play.

17. (SBU) The Jagdeo-Corbin meeting, although a useful first step in reestablishing dialogue, does not mean that compromise is in the offing. The opposition PNC/R's weekly statement April 20 flatly sets out its position - Jagdeo and his cabinet cannot hold office after August 4 without a constitutional amendment requiring a two-thirds majority vote in the National Assembly. This further supports post's view that the opposition's strategy remains the same - to trade its support for a constitutional amendment in exchange for full house-to-house verification as a concession.

18. (SBU) Baroness Amos, leader of the UK House of Lords and Tony Blair confidante, will visit her native Guyana the weekend of April 29-30 following the UK-CARICOM summit in Barbados. She plans to use the occasion to talk some sense into Guyana's political leaders - and not a moment too soon as the Parliament dissolves May 4, at which time Guyana will have neither a legislature nor an election date.

Continued Veiled Threats by Opposition Troublesome

¶9. (C) The PNC/R also launched another personal broadside against Surujbally in its April 20 statement, accusing him of "pursuing a dangerous program of deception". In the wake of the April 22 assassination of GoG cabinet-member Satyadeow Sawh (septel), this type of rhetoric is no laughing matter. Surujbally, who has been the focus of verbal attacks by opposition politicians for months, recently confided to Ambassador that he considers himself a "dead man walking".

¶10. (C) The PNC/R leaders have made a habit of peppering their public statements with references to the chaos and violence that will ensue if election preparations continue on their current path. Of course, they point to other uncontrollable, unnamed elements as the sources of such unrest. Post believes these veiled threats are irresponsible and inflammatory, giving succor to those who want to disrupt the election process. Post will devise and seek Department concurrence on tactics to be used against political parties that directly or indirectly promote election-related violence.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Guyanese bristle at comparisons between their country and Haiti. Yet, as one letter-writer put it recently in the Stabroek News, Guyana "is suffering from gross managerial incompetence" if after five years and US\$15 million, GECOM cannot deliver an election for less than 500,000 voters on time. Recent events underscore GECOM's fundamentally flawed structure where the politically appointed commissioners are put in straightjackets by their political masters.

¶12. (SBU) Comment continued. GECOM made a critical mistake when it failed to set a new election date when announcing August 4 was no longer achievable. We are now in a state of limbo. GECOM staff are moving ahead with preparations for an

August 31 poll date. But as far as the opposition parties are concerned, nothing can happen until a full house-to-house verification exercise is agreed to and a deal is struck on post May 4 governance. And so with each passing week that these fundamental issues go unresolved, Guyana heads closer to a Haiti-like scenario of election delays. End comment.
BULLEN